



MANZANAR, DIVERTED

WHEN
WATER
BECOMES
DUST

SCREENING GUIDE



ABOUT THE FILM

At the foot of the majestic snow-capped Sierras, Manzanar, the WWII concentration camp, becomes the confluence for memories of Payahuunadü, the now-parched “land of flowing water.” Intergenerational women from Native American, Japanese American and rancher communities form an unexpected alliance to defend their land and water from the City of Los Angeles.

Filmed over five years, the documentary captures stunning and intimate imagery of Payahuunadü/Owens Valley, combined with archival gems and careful research to narrate this epic tale of the American West. It begins before colonizers came and then shows how the US Army and settlers forced out the Nüümü and Newe; how the LA Aqueduct sucked the Valley dry; how incarcerated Japanese Americans made the land green again; how Patsiata/Owens Lake became a health hazard and how this Valley now bears the pain of these stories and the consequences of losing water to diversion.

Using this Screening Guide

This resource created for **Manzanar, Diverted: When Water Becomes Dust** supports educational and community screenings. It encourages viewers to consider our responsibilities to our past and how we might confront and build a better future. How can you use this guide to build community as well as form coalitions with other communities?



“Every mountain up here has a story behind it. Those are part of who we are and where we come from. If they come in and change the land, those stories become meaningless.”

**KATHY JEFFERSON BANCROFT,
LONE PINE PAIUTE-SHOSHONE TRIBE**

FROM THE FILMMAKER

As I began researching Manzanar and the Owens Valley, which I later learned was Payahuunadü, ‘the land of flowing water,’ I was dumbfounded to find that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) owned over 90 percent of the Valley. As a third generation LA resident, I knew that LA water came from the Sierras, but it was always a vague concept. During the 1970s drought years, my mother taught me how precious water was by using gray water. But I had forgotten that Japanese Americans like her had been incarcerated on the land where we got our water. What had made this a rich homeland for Native Americans was also what made it desirable to LA, which was also on Tongva and other Indigenous people’s land. I was determined to put these stories together and impress upon audiences our responsibility to this land and water.

ANN KANEKO, FILMMAKER



SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS/MODERATORS

Access the [Radical Optimist Collective](#) resource for using documentary films to facilitate engagement, dialogue and community building.

There are multiple ways to organize your conversations and community event. If helpful, consider these steps to organize your discussion:

- + Review **Context** and **Connections**
- + Choose one or more **Framing Topics** to focus your post-screening conversation
- + Read and share quotes curated from the film to **Reconnect** to the story
- + Pose **Discussion Questions** to open up additional conversations
- + Share the **Take Action** steps **Connection**

WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

Clip #1: 3:27 - 3:40

This film calls places by their original Indigenous names to acknowledge how these places have been named for thousands of years. For example, “Payahuunadü” is the Nuümü name of the Owens Valley. Similarly, it tries to call things as they are and avoids using terms like the “Owens Valley War” to describe the one-sided 1860s conflicts between Native Americans and settlers. It does not use [euphemistic US Government](#) terms like “relocation” to describe Japanese American incarceration. Using names and terminology that do not acknowledge these complicated and violent histories, can be a source of trauma to the communities that were victimized.



Reflect and Discuss:

- + How could referencing Payahuunadü as the Owens Valley rather than its indigenous name, reinforce historical trauma especially for Native Americans?
- + Why is it important to examine our language?
- + In your opinion, how does appropriate use of language and truth telling contribute to healing?



The outsiders came into this valley and renamed it. We call it Payahuunadü, which means the place where the water always flows.

**KATHY JEFFERSON BANCROFT,
LONE PINE PAIUTE-SHOSHONE TRIBE**

WHOSE LAND IS THIS?

Clip #2: 4:51 - 6:15

History is often written from the perspective of colonizers and rarely acknowledges the original people who inhabit the land we occupy. The Nüümü (Paiute) and Newe (Shoshone) have lived in Payahuunadü for thousands of years. In 1855 colonizers arrived in the region bringing cattle who grazed on Native agriculture and wild plants, decimating the tribes' food sources. Nüümü and Newe killed some cattle to survive. Conflict escalated from 1862-1863, and hundreds of Indigenous people were massacred by California Volunteers (active units serving the Union Army from 1861-1866) and local colonizers. Those who survived were forced to relocate to Fort Tejon in 1863.



Reflect and Discuss:

- + Kathy Bancroft speaks of Payahuunadü as her homeland and protecting the right to this place. Where is your home? What is your relationship to its land and water?
- + Do you know whose land you are on? Visit [Native Land map](#). What can you do in your local community to honor, preserve and protect Indigenous communities?
- + What were you taught about the forced removal of Indigenous people to create our country? What is your responsibility to this history and these nations who continue to fight for recognition and sovereignty?
- + While the US was fighting over the abolition of slavery during the Civil War, it was forcibly removing Native Americans from their homelands. Can you think of other historic moments when the government was fighting for a cause while simultaneously violating the rights of others? Why is understanding the interconnectedness of these struggles important?

They talk about history in this valley starting when outsiders came in, so the Native people of this valley are pushed aside, ignored, not listened to, and that's been the case all along. This is our home.

KATHY JEFFERSON BANCROFT,
LONE PINE PAIUTE-SHOSHONE TRIBE

Our tribal citizens and allies have traveled eight hours to deliver this message regarding delivery of irrigation water per the 1939 land exchange agreement...without water, our tribe is placed in a state of emergency.

SHANNON ROMERO, BIG PINE PAIUTE TRIBE

HOW HAS LADWP UPSET THE BALANCE OF PAYAHUUNADÜ?

Clip #3: 26:40 - 28:22

In the late 19th, early 20th century, land speculators began purchasing land and water rights in Payahuunadü, and the LADWP began extracting and diverting water to the booming city of LA.

- **By 1926**, the LA Aqueduct had almost drained Patsiata (Owens Lake), the third largest lake in California.
- **By 1937**, LAWDP had bought approximately 85% of all private property in Payahuunadü including broad swatches of ranch land and associated water rights.
- **In 1939**, Congress authorized a land exchange between Los Angeles and the Department of the Interior resulting in the landbase for what would become the Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine reservations. Federal Reserved Indian Water Rights were not traded in this Land Exchange and water rights belonging to this land remain unresolved.

With the draining of Patsiata, it became a small brine pool surrounded by playa (a dry alkali lake bed). High winds blew huge amounts of toxic dust from the exposed lakebed, causing serious health and upper respiratory problems for locals. Indigenous people and Japanese Americans incarcerated in the area were exposed to PM 2.5. In the 1970s, a second aqueduct was built, which led to more groundwater pumping and even more dust.



Reflect and Discuss:

- + How has the capture of Payahuunadü water caused a cascade of other consequences?
- + Which communities have been impacted by these imbalances in Payahuunadü? How have they been affected?
- + Land ownership is a Western concept. How has this idea differed from an Indigenous perspective of land stewardship? What responsibilities do landowners have to protect, preserve and steward?

One of the things that has been their [LADWP] modus operandi now is that they are trying to re-characterize this valley as always being a desert....And it wasn't. What made it such a desert is their pumping.

MARY ROPER, OWENS VALLEY COMMITTEE MEMBER

You [LADWP] own the land, but does that give you the right to destroy the economy and the environment of somewhere else in the same state? ...The water is really property of the people and the public.

MARK LACEY,
RANCHER AND OWENS VALLEY COMMITTEE MEMBER

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN RESISTANCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY?

Clip #4: 38:40 - 40:34

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, citing military necessity as the basis for forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. Over 11,000 people, who left behind homes and businesses, eventually passed through Manzanar concentration camps (1 of 10 in the U.S.), some living there almost three and a half years. The camp was on Indigenous lands, and many local tribal people who worked and came to know Japanese Americans, shared local fishing spots with them.



Reflect and Discuss:

- + What keeps you going in the face of adversity? How have you been resistant or retained agency in the face of oppression or racism?
- + We see many efforts to heal and address intergenerational trauma—collecting stories, honoring memory, commemorating anniversaries, creating coalitions and more. How can these actions address trauma and violations of human dignity in your own community? Why is it important that these stories are passed down to the next generation?
- + Many would consider Manzanar National Historic Site as a [Site of Conscience](#). How can Manzanar and other sites like it be a vehicle for healing and change?
- + Why do you think the stewardship of historical sites is necessary?

Water was also the means of resistance. And so it was the same vehicle that people...used, to tell their stories, whether they were etching it in the concrete of the water reservoir, or with the beautiful, amazing gardens. And so water became, for me, this metaphor, both of the oppression, but also the resistance to that.

**MONICA MARIKO EMBREY,
GRANDDAUGHTER OF SUE KUNITOMI EMBREY
AND SIERRA CLUB ORGANIZER**

Manzanar is one little tiny square mile of land that has a deep history of forced removal, and that can be forced removal to this place--like the government did with Japanese Americans--or from this place--like the government did with Owens Valley Paiute.

**ROSE MASTERS, MANZANAR NATIONAL
HISTORIC SITE RANGER**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Clip #5: 47:29 - 48:58

In the fight against the LADWP solar ranch, Native Americans, Japanese Americans and ranchers turned environmentalists came together to successfully halt this project in 2014. The establishment of the Manzanar National Historic Site also pitted the LADWP against a coalition which triumphed in 1992.



Reflect and Discuss:

- + How is coalition building an effective way to make change? Can you identify times when different communities form an unexpected alliance to support a cause?
- + Southern California is in a major drought and reservoirs are at a historic low. For communities in Western states, how can people encourage conservation of water and change infrastructure so that cities and counties are less dependent on imported water? How can communities come together to consider ways of dealing with contamination of water sources and depleted watersheds?
- + What do you think building multigenerational diverse coalitions in the climate justice movement requires? Why?



In trying to preserve Manzanar, I've sort of turned a negative experience into something a bit more positive, and you sort of make peace with the past and try to use it to educate other people and to try to learn a lesson. I think we've reached a point in America where we have to look at ourselves as more of a diverse nation and that all of us bring strength to the country and that we try to understand each other better.

SUE KUNITOMI EMBREY, CO-FOUNDER OF THE MANZANAR COMMITTEE



TAKE ACTION TODAY

1 Awareness and education remain essential for water conservation work and for preserving and protecting the historical sites and spaces of memory. What can you do in your local community to honor, preserve and protect Indigenous communities?

2 Southern California is in a major drought and reservoirs are at a historic low. How can metropolitan areas help to conserve water and change infrastructure so that cities are less dependent on imported water?

3 Many Indigenous nations like the [Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Paiute Tribe](#) are fighting for federal recognition. How can you support?



Look to these organizations and partners to support and learn more.

- + [Center for Biological Diversity](#)
- + [Council for Watershed Health](#)
- + [Densho](#)
- + [Eastern California Museum](#)
- + [Earthworks](#)
- + [Friends of the Inyo](#)
- + [Japanese American National Museum](#)
- + [Manzanar Committee](#)
- + [Manzanar National Historic Site](#)
- + [Mono Lake Committee](#)
- + [Native Land](#)
- + [Our Water LA Coalition](#)
- + [Owens Valley Committee](#)
- + [Owens Valley Indian Water Commission](#)
- + [Pacoima Beautiful](#)
- + [Sierra Club Range of Light Group](#)
- + [Sierra Club](#)
- + [TreePeople](#)
- + [Tsuru for Solidarity](#)
- + [Walking Water](#)

“The period I spent in Manzanar was the most traumatic experience of my life. It has influenced my perspective as well as my continuing efforts to educate, persuade and encourage others of my generation to speak out about the unspeakable crime.”

SUE KUNITOMI EMBREY, CO-FOUNDER OF THE MANZANAR COMMITTEE

Let's talk about the role of memory here and how that intersects with the culture of the city of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power... and part of the ploy is to outlive the people that remember....So if it's not documented in a way that's easy for the future to access, then it just relies on us being truth tellers.

NANCY MASTERS, OWENS VALLEY COMMITTEE

Impact Team

Ann Kaneko (Director/Producer) is a third generation Los Angeles (Tongva lands) resident. She has worked on advocacy videos for many labor and community groups. She is also an Emmy-winner who has created media pieces for the Skirball Cultural Center, the Japanese American National Museum and the Getty Center. She currently teaches Media Studies at Pitzer College.

Jin Yoo-Kim (Producer/Impact Producer) is a Korean Bolivian American filmmaker, who has successfully executed three digital campaigns and has worked on four impact campaigns addressing immigration, identity, land and water rights, and racial politics in the U.S.

Danielle Young (Assistant) is a Black multidisciplinary artist hailing from Anishinaabe Aki with a passion for building sustainable community infrastructure.

Sohni Kaur (Assistant) is a recent college graduate with a love for filmmaking and a passion for increasing authentic representation in media.

Film Links

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Press Info

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For screening opportunities, please email manzanardiverted@gmail.com

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